

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

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1. An information reference apparatus comprising:
- a reference information storage part storing predetermined reference information;
- 10 a reference range defining information storage part storing predetermined reference range defining information; and
- a reference range defining part referring to the reference range defining information stored
- 15 for a user by said reference range defining information storage part and defining a range of the reference information stored by said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to
- 20 refer to.
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2. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:
- a contribution receiving part receiving a contribution from a user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage
- 30 part.
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3. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:
- an authenticating part allowing a user to

refer to the reference information after an authentication of the user is normally finished.

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4. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

10 a search range defining part responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus for referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part, and thereby defining a range of the reference information, in which range
15 the reference information is available for the search.

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5. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

25 an URL management part registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning to the apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the relevant user.

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6. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein:

35 each user is given an attribute, and a user who makes a contribution is allowed to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to

information included in the contribution, by
designating the attribute thus given to the users.

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7. The information reference apparatus as
claimed in claim 1, further comprising a referred
information managing part storing information for
10 determining whether or not an item of the reference
information has been already referred to by a
specific user, and enabling said specific user to
determine that the item of reference information has
been already referred to by himself or herself with
15 a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving
a reference request from the specific user.

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8. The information reference apparatus as
claimed in claim 1, wherein:
the reference range defining information
comprises information designating, for each item of
25 the reference information, a range of users who are
allowed to refer thereto, a determination as to
whether or not each item of the reference
information is available for a particular user being
made by determining whether or not an attribute set
30 for the particular user is included in said range of
users designated for said item of the reference
information.

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9. An information reference system

comprising:

a reference information storage part
storing predetermined reference information;

5 a reference range defining information
storage part storing predetermined reference range
defining information; and

a reference range defining part referring
to the reference range defining information stored
for a user by said reference range defining
10 information storage part and defining a range of the
reference information stored by said reference
information storage part, in which range the
reference information is available for the user to
refer to.

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10. The information reference system as
20 claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

a contribution receiving part receiving a
contribution from a user and storing the
contribution in said reference information storage
part.

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11. The information reference system as
30 claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

an authenticating part allowing a user to
refer to the reference information when an
authentication for the user is normally finished.

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12. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

5 a search range defining part responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus for referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part, and thereby defining a range of the reference information stored in the reference information storage part, in which range
10 the reference information is available for the search.

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13. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

an URL management part registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL
20 reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning, to the user's apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the user.

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14. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, wherein:

30 each user is given an attribute, and a user who makes a contribution is allowed to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to information included in the contribution, by designating the attribute thus given to the users.

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15. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising a referred information managing part storing information for determining whether or not an item of the reference
5 information has been already referred to by a specific user, and enabling said specific user to determine that the item of reference information has been already referred to by himself or herself with a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving
10 a reference request from the specific user.

16. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, wherein:
the reference range defining information comprises information designating for each item of the reference information a range of users who are
20 allowed to refer to said item of the reference information, a determination as to whether or not each item of the reference information is available to be referred to by a particular user being made by determining whether or not an attribute set for said
25 particular user is included in said range of users thus designated for said item of the reference information.

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17. An information reference program causing a computer to execute the steps of:
a) storing predetermined reference
35 information in a reference information storage part;
b) storing predetermined reference range defining information in a reference defining

information storage part; and

c) referring to the reference range
defining information stored for a user in said
reference range defining information storage part
5 and defining a range of the reference information
stored in said reference information storage part,
in which range the reference information is
available for the user to refer to.

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18. The information reference program as
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to
15 execute the step of:

d) receiving a contribution from a user
and storing the contribution in said reference
information storage part.

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19. The information reference program as
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to
25 execute the step of:

d) allowing a user to refer to the
reference information stored in the reference
information storage part when an authentication for
the user is normally finished.

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20. The information reference program as
35 claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to
execute the step of:

d) responsive to a search request from a

user's apparatus, referring to the reference range
defining information from said reference range
defining information storage part, and thereby
defining a range of the reference information stored
5 in the reference information storage part, in which
range the reference information is available for the
search.

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21. The information reference program
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to
execute the step of:

15 d) registering an URL for each user, and
being responsive to an URL reference request sent
from a user's apparatus via a communication network
for returning, to the user's apparatus, information
of URL previously registered for the user.

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22. The information reference program as
25 claimed in claim 17, causing the computer to execute
the step of:

d) providing each user with an attribute,
and allowing a user who makes a contribution to
define a range of users who are allowed to refer to
30 information included in the contribution, by
designating the attribute thus given to the users.

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23. The information reference program as
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to

execute the step of:

5 d) storing information for determining
whether or not an item of the reference information
has been already referred to by a specific user, and
enabling said specific user to determine that the
item of reference information has been already
referred to by himself or herself with a use of the
thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference
request from the specific user.

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24. The information reference program as
15 claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to
execute the steps of:

 d) creating the reference range defining
information to comprise information designating for
each item of the reference information a range of
20 users who are allowed to refer to said item of the
reference information, and making a determination as
to whether or not each item of the reference
information is available to be referred to by a
particular user by determining whether or not an
25 attribute set for said particular user is included
in said range of users thus designated for said item
of the reference information.

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25. A computer readable information
storage medium storing therein the program claimed
in claim 17.

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26. A computer readable information
storage medium storing therein the program claimed
in claim 18.

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27. A computer readable information
storage medium storing therein the program claimed
10 in claim 19.

15 28. A computer readable information
storage medium storing therein the program claimed
in claim 20.

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29. A computer readable information
storage medium storing therein the program claimed
in claim 21.

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30. A computer readable information
30 storage medium storing therein the program claimed
in claim 22.

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31. A computer readable information
storage medium storing therein the program claimed

in claim 23.

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32. A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 24.

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33. An information reference method comprising the steps of:

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a) storing predetermined reference information in a reference information storage part;

b) storing predetermined reference range defining information in a reference defining information storage part; and

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c) referring to the reference range defining information stored for a user in said reference range defining information storage part and defining a range of the reference information stored in said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to refer to.

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34. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

d) receiving a contribution from a user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage part.

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35. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

- d) allowing a user to refer to the reference information stored in the reference information storage part when an authentication for the user is normally finished.

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36. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

- d) responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus, referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part and thereby defining a range of the reference information stored in the reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the search.

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37. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

- d) registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning, to the user's apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the user.

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38. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

d) providing each user an attribute, and
allowing a user who makes a contribution to define a
range of users who are allowed to refer to
information included in the contribution, by
5 designating the attribute thus given to the users.

10 39. The information reference method as
claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

d) storing information for determining
whether or not an item of the reference information
has been already referred to by a specific user, and
15 enabling said specific user to determine that the
item of reference information has been already
referred to by himself or herself with a use of the
thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference
request from the specific user.

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40. The information reference program as
25 claimed in claim 34, further comprising the step of:

d) creating the reference range defining
information to comprise information designating for
each item of the reference information a range of
users who are allowed to refer to said item of the
30 reference information, and making a determination as
to whether or not each item of the reference
information is available to be referred to by a
particular user by determining whether or not an
attribute set for said particular user is included
35 in said range of users thus designated for said item
of the reference information.